

# LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Senator Tim Sheldon • 35th Legislative District

# 2000

June 2000

## Dear Neighbor,

The 2000 legislative session is finally over.

Each of the ten sessions I have experienced in the House and Senate has its own identity. No surprise, this session was all about Initiatives 695, passed by our district by a wide margin and statewide with 56 percent of the vote.

I-695 cut vehicle license tabs to \$30 per year and enacted a vote of the people for all new taxes.

The courts eventually will tell us exactly how I-695 will play out.

We all have our opinion on what the voters were saying by passing I-695. Personally, I believe citizens want more efficient use of their tax dollars — a state government that lives within its means and does a better job with limited resources. We still have a long way to go.

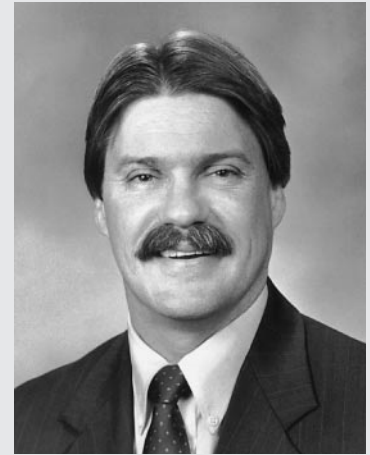
This newsletter is my effort to keep you informed of how I voted in Olympia. It also highlights certain issues I think are important to the people and families in the 35th District. I look forward to hearing from you on these and other issues.

As always, it is an honor to serve you in the state Senate. Please feel free to contact me at my office at (360) 786-7668 or via e-mail ([sheldon\\_ti@leg.wa.gov](mailto:sheldon_ti@leg.wa.gov)) with your concerns or comments.

Sincerely,



Tim Sheldon  
State Senator, 35th Legislative District



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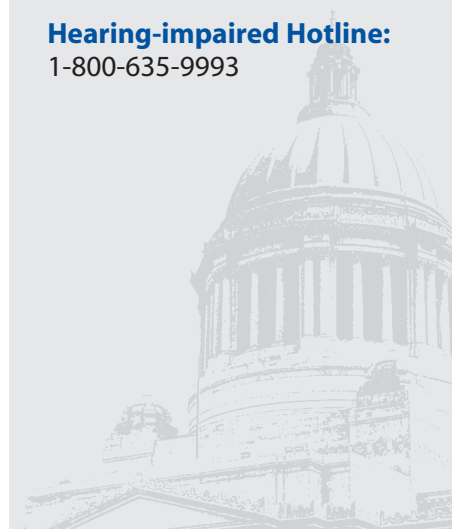
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## 2000 Session Highlights

### \$30 Car Tabs

*I voted* **YES**

Prior to adoption of I-695 in November 1999, a tax based upon the year and value of a vehicle was imposed on registered owners. It was obviously a very unpopular tax. I-695 replaced this fee (the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax or MVET) with a flat, annual license tax fee of \$30. When a King County Superior Court judge overturned the initiative during the legislative session, the Legislature immediately voted to make the \$30 car tabs permanent. I voted for this bill.

### Supplemental Budget

*I voted* **NO**

Usually a supplemental budget is a simple addendum to the biennial general budget passed the previous year. This year, however, it was a complete rewrite of the \$20.1 billion general fund budget because of the \$1.2 billion shortfall caused by I-695.

Rewriting budgets to reallocate some revenue lost by local governments, transit and transportation because of I-695 resulted in much debate and extended the session 33 days.

I voted against the budget bill that passed and other budget-related bills for several reasons. I-601, passed by the voters in 1993, set spending limits for the general fund and established an emergency fund. The budget that eventually passed the Legislature raised the spending limit by \$262 million this year. The budget also cut the emergency reserve to \$517 million from \$760 million.

No property tax cuts were approved, yet \$15 million in general fund dollars were sent to Seattle as a down payment on the new subway from the University of Washington to the Northgate Mall. This is a terrible misuse of funds that are earmarked primarily for education.

### Transportation Budget

*I voted* **YES**

I-695 impacted our ferry system and took \$700 million away from new highway projects. By selling bonds backed by rental car taxes, reserve account interest and I-695 license fees, the Legislature was able to restart about 1/3 of the previously delayed highway projects. I voted for the transportation budget.

Ferry riders will experience some cuts in service, but will see no increase in fares. My bill to allow private operators to provide passenger-only service passed the Senate, but was killed by the House because of heavy lobbying by the ferry unions. In my opinion, customer service and competition can only help — not hurt — marine transportation across Puget Sound.

### Property Tax Relief

*I voted* **YES**

After considering and finally rejecting several alternatives, the Legislature again failed to pass meaningful property tax relief.

Each year I have proposed the same bill that essentially would freeze property tax assessments for homeowners and limit annual assessment increases to no more than 2 percent or inflation, whichever is less. In my opinion, once property tax increases are brought under control, citizens will be much more likely to vote for local levies and bonds.

Many seniors, in spite of senior exemptions, tell me that property tax increases are driving them from their homes. This is totally unacceptable and must be remedied.

## Privacy

*I voted* **NO**

While no bill made it all the way through the Legislature this year, several attempts were made at protecting consumers from companies that sell your sensitive and personal information. Unfortunately, in my opinion, no bill went far enough in protecting the consumer's right to privacy.

One proposal would have allowed bankers to share your personal information (assets, name and address, purchasing history) with their affiliates — finance companies, stockbrokers, etc. — if you don't expressly inform the bank **not** to share your information. My view is that companies should never share any of your confidential information without your written authorization. There is a big difference between written authorization and the right-to-refuse language hidden in the fine print.

## Patients Bill of Rights

*I voted* **YES**

This session we helped put medical decisions back in the hands of patients and their doctors instead leaving them to the insurance companies. The Patients Bill of Rights strikes a balance between providing quality health care and containing rising health care costs. The legislation will ensure that consumers can get information to make informed decisions when they purchase health care and hold their health care plans accountable. There is no excuse for someone's life to hang in the balance while an insurance company decides whether to pay for a medical procedure.

Under the new law you now have several basic rights:

- A timely external and independent medical review of health care disputes.
- The right to sue managed care plans if patients believe their managed care system has harmed them through negligence.
- Access to information about health care plans.
- Protection from unnecessary invasions of health care privacy.
- A health plan medical director who is a licensed doctor.

## Individual Health Insurance Market

*I voted* **YES**

About 250,000 people receive health insurance through the individual market, meaning they buy their own policies and are not part of a group. But since last September, private insurance hasn't been available to new enrollees in 30 of the state's 39 counties. I supported the individual health insurance market bill, signed into law, which aims to:

- bring the private health insurers back into the market by modifying insurance rules; and
- provide consumers with a choice of individual health insurance plans, including plans that cover maternity care and prescription drugs.

## Worker Retraining

*I voted* **YES**

This session we witnessed the passage of a new law designed to aid laid-off aerospace, timber and fish workers who are in retraining programs for high-demand fields. Gov. Gary Locke already signed the bill into law, making up to 11 months of extra unemployment (mostly federal funds) available to these workers and their families. The Washington State Dept. of Employment Security estimates 20,000 dislocated workers will benefit from extended benefits that help them enroll in retraining programs.

Additionally, the bill gives businesses a break by canceling an unfair unemployment insurance (UI) tax increase, saving most Washington employers millions over the next six years.

## Senate Pages

I'd like to thank all the students who came to Olympia to work as Senate pages for a week during the session. Pictured are:

**Top row (left to right):** **Maria Densley**, Shelton High School; **Nicole Hamm**, Central Kitsap Jr. High School; **Kecia Jones**, Tumwater High School; **Amber Mark**, Mary M. Knight High School;

**Bottom row (left to right):** **Staci Jo Nelson**, Shelton High School; **Justin Rivas**, Komachin Middle School; **Tyler Schlauderaff**, Shelton Middle School; **Bridgette Valdez**, North Thurston High School;  
**Not pictured:** **Melissa Lee**, Capital High School; **Danielle Rodgers**, Central Kitsap Jr. High School

**Want to page?** Pages must be at least 14 years old and have a C+ or better grade point average. To request a page application for 2001, call (360) 786-7550. Or contact my office.



## Illegal Dumping

Nobody wants to go hiking or hunting and trip over an old mattress or other people's junk. That's why I sponsored a bill (SSB 6194) — now law — designed to keep illegal dumps from festering in rural, unincorporated areas. The bill makes it a misdemeanor to litter more than 1 cubic yard or to abandon a junk vehicle in an unincorporated area. A person guilty of littering is required to pay the greater of twice the actual cleanup cost, or:

- \$50 per cubic foot of litter for the misdemeanor;
- \$100 per cubic foot of litter for the gross misdemeanor.

It also requires a litter cleanup restitution payment to be split between the landowner and the law enforcement agency or local health department investigating the incident. Hopefully the law will encourage agencies to pursue guilty parties.



**Sen. Tim Sheldon and Mason Co. Sheriff Deputy Ted Drogmund** examine an illegal rural garbage dump in the county. A new law, sponsored by Sheldon, would increase criminal penalties for illegal dumping, including junk vehicles.

*I voted* **YES**

*Recycled* ♻️

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